

CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

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VOL. I.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you—JOHN xiii. 34.

ON THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION. CHAPTER III.

Continued from page 186.

FOUR of the few and mutilated works which remain to us of the apostolic fathers, mention the resurrection and ascension of Christ: and Quadratus, who lived nearly at the same period, has left us a striking testimony to the miracles of our Saviour. He asserts, "that those whom he healed and raised were well known, and that some had even lived until his times."* It would be in vain to quote the recognition of miracles, and of the same miracles, in the works of succeeding writers.

The miraculous nature of the story of the original Christian Missionaries, is a fact which may be securely trusted to the preceding evidence. That it was in the main what we have now, may be proved by the same means,—namely, by the incidental and unsuspecting testimony of the letters of its first teachers. From these we may collect, besides what we have already mentioned, Christ's descent and family—his innocence,—the meekness of his character—his exalted nature—his life of self-denial and sufferings—his patience and resignation—the appointment of Eucharist, and the manner of it—his agony—his confession before Pontius Pilate—his stripes, crucifixion, and burial—his resurrection, and re-appearance; first to Peter, then to the rest of the apostles—his ascension into heaven, and his designation to be the future judge of mankind—the stated residence of the apostles at Jerusalem, and the successful propagation of the religion.† We may add to this statement, that the remaining works of the apostolic fathers mention many of the material, and many of the minute facts recorded in our histories,—and that they are never at variance

with them, or the letters of the apostles. We may urge too, that no other story was ever produced; for even the gospels, which we consider as apocryphal, agree in the main with our received histories, and only differ from them by unauthorised additions,—they all assert the divine mission, miracles and resurrection of Christ. It may also be added, though the argument is sufficiently established, that the undoubted reception of our four canonical gospels, by the first race of Christians after the apostles, and by the churches which the apostles had instructed, (which we shall shew to have been the case under the next proposition,) decisively proves that they contained, as to all material and leading facts what the apostles themselves had preached and asserted.

In the last place, we are to prove that the original preachers of Christianity voluntarily underwent labours, dangers, and sufferings, to establish this miraculous story. Although this argument is, I think capable of being sustained by pagan testimony alone, yet here, also, we are able to extract a decisive proof from the writings of the Christians themselves. Let us first examine the force of the former. Tacitus, in his memorable description of Nero's persecution, mentions that "a vast multitude (of Christians) were convicted, not so much of the crime of burning Rome, as of hatred to mankind:* that sufferings at their execution were aggravated by insult and mockery,—for some were disguised in skins of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs,—some were crucified,—and others when the day closed, were wrapped in pitch shirts, and set on fire, that they might illuminate the night. This conduct (of Nero) created pity towards the suffer-

* This absurd opinion might arise from the Christians associating principally among themselves, and retiring as much as possible from the world. The justice of it, and of the term *exitiabilis superstitio*, may be estimated by reading the rule of conduct delivered to these very men a few years before by St. Paul, particularly Romans xii. xiii.

ers, though they were criminals and deserving the severest punishments."

Our concern with this passage, at present, is only so far as it affords a presumption in support of the proposition which we maintain, as to the activity and sufferings of the first teachers of Christianity. It tends, among other things, to confirm the enmity and false notions of the pagans, in regard to the Christians, and it proves indisputably—if the religion, which thirty-four years before arose in Judea, had overspread that country, had extended itself to Rome, and had already gained there a vast number of converts—that the original teachers and missionaries of the institution could not have been idle; and, when we call to mind the known state of the opinions and tempers of mankind at the time the religion was first promulgated, (which has been considered under the preceding propositions) and remember that the fact of the execution of the author is incontestible,—when we are assured that it was first preached in the very country, among the same people, and the same age that the execution took place,—we may be well convinced that the endeavours of its first promoters could not but be attended with difficulty and danger.

Suetonius, a writer contemporary with Tacitus, describing the transactions of the same reign, says, that the Christians, a set of men of a new and mischievous (or magical) * superstition, were punished.†

Juvenal‡ who lived about the same time, is also supposed, with great probability, to allude to the cruelties of Nero towards the Christians; at any rate, we are sufficiently assured that such persecutions took place, and such enmity existed to the Christian character, within thirty-one years of Christ's death, that is, according to the course

* *Malefica*—See Dr. Watson's observations on this word, in his letters to Gibbon, Sermons, and tracts, page 322.

† Suet. in Nero. cap. 16.

‡ Satires I. v. 155.

* Quad. apud Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. iv. c. 3.

† Paley's Evid. vol. I. page 124.

of nature, in the life time probably of some of the apostles, and certainly of those who were converted by them.

If, then, the author of the religion was put to death in the execution of his design—if many of the first race of Christians suffered great extremities for their profession, can it be credible, that those who came *between* the two, who were inevitably the first preachers of the religion, could carry on their undertakings with ease and safety?

To be continued.

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Dialogue between a Universalist and a Limitarian.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 186.

Lim. I have thought much, dear friend, on the subject you proposed in our last conversation, and though I feel in some measure unprepared to answer your question, I am satisfied that it is a question which every one ought to decide before they undertake to advocate the doctrine of a future state of punishment. The reason why I feel settled in this particular, is because I am fully satisfied that the resurrection of Jesus, by which life and immortality are brought to light, is the only ground of the christian's hope of an immortal state; and I am as fully convinced that his resurrection was never designed to bring to light an immortal state of misery; or in other words, an immortal state which is subject to misery. Therefore if we undertake to vindicate a state of future misery or punishment, it appears to me we must be able to support the idea of a state of being between this mortal and the immortal. But whether this can be shown from the divine testimony I have at least some doubts I confess; yet I wish to suggest one or two passages which some have thought favour such a belief. One is the words of the Saviour to the thief on the cross; "Verily, I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Now we suppose that paradise is a state of bliss, and as Jesus himself did not rise from the dead that day, he could not be in the resurrection state with the thief to whom he said, "this day shalt thou be with me in paradise." I will thank you for such remarks on this subject as you may think necessary to present it in its true light.

Uni. This I will do with all readiness, hoping at the same time, that if my views on the subject are not correct

they may have no effect in misleading your mind; but that you will be able to discover my error to my own advantage. That paradise is not a state which lies between this mortal existence and the immortal, I am inclined to think is inferable from St. Paul's description of one who was taken up into the third heaven, which heaven he calls paradise. The third heaven and paradise are therefore one; but it would hardly appear reasonable to suppose that the third heaven was a state of existence lower than, or short of the immortal. There is but one more passage, I believe, where the word paradise occurs in the Scriptures, and this is an address to the church of Ephesus, in which it is said; "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the bread of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." I believe that the tree of life on which the believer feeds by faith, is no where short of the immortal state. But this tree of life is in the midst of the paradise of God. And I think that this form of expression indicates God's special habitation. But then you will ask, why did Jesus say to the thief; "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise?" Reply; by placing the pause in the sentence so as to express the idea that Jesus said to this penitent on the day they were crucified, that he should in some future time be with him in paradise all appears clear. The sense of the words of Jesus depends on where we place the comma, as any one may see, by turning to the passage.

Lim. I must think on this subject and on your remarks a little more, before it will be prudent for me to come to a full conclusion. In the mean time I will state another passage on the same subject. St. Paul said to the Philippians; "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better." By this passage one would conclude that St. Paul was of opinion that he should be with Christ immediately after he departed from this mortal life; and if so, it seems that from the period of the dissolution of his body, until the resurrection he would occupy a state of being, which lies between this mortal and that immortal state of which this apostle spake in 1 Cor. xv. But I am willing to hear and duly consider any thing which you have to offer on this weighty subject.

To be continued.

BAPTISM.

There is in man a propensity to imitate the customs, to follow the fashions of those who are popular, and this is so strong that we sometimes witness those who have thrown off some of the most useless trappings, still willing to wear something like the great about them; this is not less evident in religious matters—the great mind of Priestly which hurled to ruin corruptions that had festered on the body of Christianity, could not surmount the prejudice of hell-torments; and the present day is a proof that the vestiges of man's tradition are too fashionable to give way to the plain and pure doctrines of Holy Writ. One of these vestiges is the baptism of infants, a ceremony nowhere authorised in Scripture, and which has given rise to persecution, and the most horrible superstition. There is one northern nation who lay down the modes of exercising and summoning the devil to depart from an infant at the rite of baptism, they say, "the diabolus crinitus or hairy devil, may be routed by a plant called hypericum quadrangulare."

The modes of infant baptism varies; sometimes no water is used, it is then termed dedication, and preachers are so anxious to perform the rite, that it is not uncommon for them to perform either way to bend to the prejudice or whim of the parents; now if it is a form, it should be followed in the identical manner in which it was instituted and certainly it is not argued to have been performed in both modes. The rite is usually preceded by an address to the people, in which we are told "That our blessed Redeemer was approached by some children, but that the disciples would have prevented them, when Jesus exclaimed, 'Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven,' and that he laid his hands on them and blessed them." No doubt the friends and those who believe with them in this respect, are compared to the disciples, but without reason, for Christ did not say, suffer the children if dedicated to come unto me, and men of reason, suffer yea, invite all to approach the throne of mercy, without any question respecting their baptism, being convinced that in the eye of the Supreme Ruler, those who walk uprightly are received with-

out respect to ordinances. But what will you do with the fact, did not Jesus bless them? Yes! and was it so unusual for blessings to flow from his lips, that an ordinance must be made on this occasion, or did our Lord command his disciples to do it, or do we find that they did do it? So far from this, that we hear nothing until the doctrine of original sin being in vogue, it was supposed that infants dying without being baptized, were shut out from heaven, this gave origin to customs degrading to Christianity, and too indelicate to repeat; it may be sufficient to say that in France they continued till very lately, and are laid down in one of the latest and best French authors, and in England they continued until 1603, when with difficulty they were declared illegal.

Indeed, water baptism, which receives no sanction from revelation and is repugnant to reason, has been the source of much evil, and pharasaical pride, that of adults, savours much of this. The water was believed by Augustin to wash away original sin, and Chrysostom taught that it "became unfit for drinking and drowned the devil." No wonder that men believed that the want of this water consigned to inevitable damnation.—The slave of a Christian could not be baptized without his master's consent, yet those of a heathen could, and might obtain freedom thereby, this looks like the wisdom of this world. Constantine the Great, justly concluding from the premises then laid down, and being loth to forsake the path of sin, delayed baptism to the last moment, and thus thought to wash away all his sins at one period.—In infant baptism, it is usual to give a name to the person. Whence this originated we are at a loss to determine, for we do not read in Scripture, of Jesus naming any one on such an occasion.—It may be said of me by those who think contrary, that I am some Quaker, and disbelieve baptism in toto, it matters not what I am, as to my belief, it is firmly fixed that baptism is essential to salvation, I profess to have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," Eph. iv. 5. not one Lord God, and one God-man, not one faith for myself, and another quite different about my neighbour, not one baptism of immersion and another of sprinkling, and another of dedication,

"I indeed have baptized you with water," said John, and this we do not believe essential, "but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost," is the one we hold to, and one very different from the former, it is not that which puts away the filth of the flesh, but that which produceth the answer of a good conscience toward God. When our Lord selected his disciples, he did not baptize them with water, indeed he never baptized any one in this mode; Peter, Andrew, Philip, Nathaniel, and others were accepted without this, his conditions were not, "Be ye immersed," but "if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me," and if they had received this ceremony, it did not entitle them, for Jesus said, "Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple," this is not quite so easy as going into water, or being sprinkled.

But did he not say, "Go teach all nations, baptizing &c." yes, but not with water baptism, or else Paul was a bad apostle, for though he preached to the Gentiles, we do not find him an advocate for water baptism; so far from it, that he thanks God that he had baptized but a few, and this appears correct in him, for "as many as are led by the spirit of God they are the sons of God," without respect to outward rites; and let a man profess what ceremony he pleases, if he "have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." It may be said, that it is a badge to distinguish the Christian, but we should remember, that a more sacred distinction is given, "By this, shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love, one to another," this is the only mark I wish to see, it will finally connect in one sacred band, men now severed by the partition wall of prejudice; and guided by its influence, the whole human family will look with regret on the follies that sowed discord among them, and leaving the vain traditions of men, will worship that Glorious Being, where goodness is as unbounded as the universe, and who through that portion of the spirit which he has given to every man to profit withall, will bind in the chords of eternal affection, all the children of Adam.—Before we close, it may be well enough to explain one thing; that is, baptism being essential

to salvation; when we say salvation, do not understand this as connected with an immortal state, it is only with a temporal, for our eternal salvation is beyond our power to lose, we never gained it—it is the gift of God.

These hints are thrown out, that parents may read, examine, and reflect about the propriety of the ordinance of baptism; if it is said, that it can be no harm, would it not be well, to consider, the harm it has done, and the impropriety of introducing any thing into Christianity, which does not belong to it, the Pharisees no doubt when they followed the traditions of men, thought in the first place, that they could prove no hurt, but we see the consequence. We know it is *fashionable* to have children dedicated and baptized; but should this influence our minds to depart from the plain simplicity of Scripture. If we are wrong in rejecting water baptism, and extolling the "one baptism," let us know it, error is no benefit to any one, if therefore, we are wrong convince us, until then, we must hold our present opinion, without bearing any ill-will, or feeling any displeasure to those who believe different.

LECTOR.

Christian Messenger.

Philadelphia, Monday, July 3, 1820.

FROM THE UNIVERSALIST MAGAZINE.

To the Editor,

REV. SIR,—As I wish our discussion may be as concise as possible, I shall immediately proceed to your next question; "How is it true, in any sense whatever, that, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound?"* I conceive this to mean, that where sin abounded, grace, or *favour*, did much more abound, for the purpose of putting a stop to *sinning*, or of "making an end of sin;" not to take away the regret and remorse, which naturally and necessarily accompany and follow any wilful transgression of the laws of right reason and of God, which has already been committed.

But "how shall we understand the divine testimony by the prophet, who says, 'I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more?'" "I

* See page 188.

will be merciful to their unrighteousness," may be considered as equivalent to, I will be merciful to them, although they are unrighteous, by giving them an opportunity to repent and reform, and thus avoid sin and its consequences in future.—"Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more," must be considered as a highly figurative expression. Omniscience cannot, *literally*, forget any thing. Omnipotent mercy may forgive, while omnipotent justice may leave a *free-agent* in such a situation, that he cannot forgive himself.

I have read the writings of St. Paul with considerable attention, and, from what he says of himself, I conceive him to have been an honest well-meaning, though over-zealous man, previous to his miraculous conversion to Christianity. He says, while he was persecuting the church, he verily thought he was doing God's service, and that for this cause he obtained mercy.—Hence I infer, that his sins were those of *error*, and not of *wilful opposition to truth*.

As your question respecting children, I can only answer for one. I must confess, that I never can recollect the pain and anxiety I have caused my parents by my disobedience, without deep regret and sorrow, and without feeling, that I am less happy, than I might have been, had I obeyed their lawful and reasonable commands and exhortations. This brings us to the prodigal son; and I believe it is now time for me to ask for a proof, that he was as happy at his return, as he might have been, had he not left his father's house, as he did, and become a prodigal son.

I conclude, by observing that there can be but one Being in the universe *infinitely* happy. All others must be *relatively* happy, and consequently *comparatively* unhappy. As it respects the human race, reason and Scripture appear, to my mind, plainly to intimate, that their happiness or unhappiness, here and hereafter, will be proportionate to the "deeds done in the body," including the motives, by which they are influenced. "They shall eat the fruit of their own doings." "As one star differeth from another star in glory, so also is the resurrection."

These candid observations are sub-

mitted to your candid consideration, by your friend and humble servant.

PRIESTLEY.

REPLY TO "PRIESTLEY,"

DEAR SIR,—I am rather inclined to think that something more is meant by the superabundance of grace over sin, than simply to prevent the commission of sin. It appears to me, that the very nature of grace endeavours to remove the sorrows of heart which are occasioned by transgression. If you cannot agree with me in this, will you inform me what does in any measure remove such sorrows? Or will you maintain that the pungency of guilt and regret will always remain, even to all eternity? It appears evident to me, that when Joseph said to his brethren; "Now, therefore, be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me," he meant something more than that they should not repeat these crimes. He evidently expressed a desire that the regret and sorrow which then deeply wounded their truly fraternal bosoms, should subside in the contemplation of the wisdom and goodness of God, who sent Joseph before them to preserve their lives. I am, dear sir, persuaded that more is indicated by the power of grace, than you allow, in the following words of Jesus to Simon the Pharisee; "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. Mine head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore, I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

That the reformed prodigal was happier than he would have been, had he not gone from home, perhaps we cannot demonstrate; but if we may judge from what is said of the elder brother, who did not leave his father, it is very evident that the experience which the former went through tended to make his home more dear to him. Which, Sir, do you think was the happiest man, on the evening the fatted calf was eaten and music and dancing performed as expressions of gladness at the return of the prodigal? And now, as it comes into my mind, I humbly ask you, what our Saviour meant by saying; "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance?" Am I to suppose that you think that St. Paul never committed a known sin? And if he did, do you believe that his misery in consequence will be endless? And furthermore, do you expect to suffer eternally for the childish disobedience to your parents, which has not yet ceased to cause you regret?

To conclude; you say "omniscience cannot *literally* forget any thing." But God says; "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." Now if he cannot himself forget, yet he can cause his creatures to forget their "poverty and to remember their miseries no more."

FROM THE UNIVERSALIST MAGAZINE.

Extract of a Letter from a Correspondent in Halifax, Vt. dated June 6th, 1820.

DEAR SIR,

I have the happiness of informing you that the Rev. HOLLIS SAMSON, of Wilmington, Vt. has lately come forth in public vindication of the doctrine of Universal Salvation. Considering his superior talents and impressive eloquence, the result appears very favourable to the interest of the Gospel.

"It is but a few weeks since he has so fully avowed the doctrine; though he has been progressing towards it for many months. I understand his brethren have commenced the process with him, usually attendant on an extension of the knowledge of the grace of God, viz. church-meetings, church-labours, &c. I believe that many of his people still fellowship him, and that numbers have been brought to trust in God as the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe."